

#1
COVER A

10
FOR
10

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF ASPEN COMICS!

brian BUCCELLATO • pasquale QUALANO • john STARR • josh REED

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BLOCKADE
ENTERTAINMENT

ALL NEW
EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT

IT'S



U/L
2013





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HONOR BOUND

PART 1 OF 5

BRIAN BUCCELLATO

- story -

PASQUALE QUALANO

- pencils -

CHAZ RIGGS

- digital inks -

JOHN STARR

- colors -

JOSH REED

- lettering -

The story so far...

They are raised from their youth with strict obedience and brutally trained to protect and serve their respective masters with discipline, loyalty and often times violence, if necessary. They are the Executive Assistants.

Executive Assistant: Iris created by David Wohl, Brad Foxhoven & Michael Turner

Editors: VINCE HERNANDEZ, FRANK MASTROMAURO Design and Production: MARK ROSLAN, PETER STEIGERWALD, JOSH REED

Lettering font designed by: DREAMER DESIGN

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ALL NEW EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT: IRIS™ Vol. 4 Issue I

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WUHAN, CHINA: A MODERN CITY WITH ANCIENT ROOTS THAT GO BACK THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

IT'S RICH WITH CULTURE, HAS A THRIVING RIVERFRONT AND HAS BEEN A CENTER OF LEARNING FOR CENTURIES.

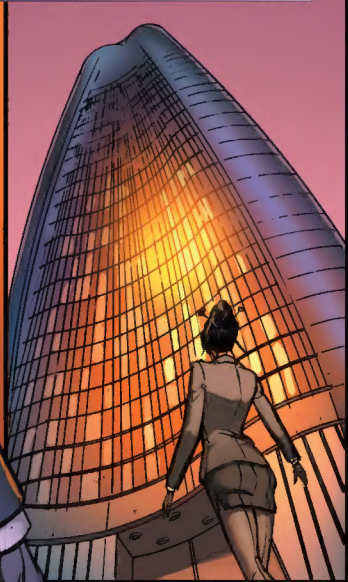
FOR A CAPITAL CITY WITH A POPULATION OF NINE MILLION, IT'S SURPRISING HOW OFTEN IT'S OVERLOOKED.

I WAS BORN HERE... I WENT TO SCHOOL HERE... FOR ALMOST HALF MY LIFE I CALLED THIS PLACE HOME.

I SHOULD REMEMBER IT BETTER.


IT'S NOT SURPRISING
THAT I'VE FORGOTTEN
SO MUCH.

WHEN YOUR EARLIEST DAYS ARE SPENT IN
DICKENSIAN ORPHANAGES OR AMONG THE VERMIN
IN THE DARKEST CORNERS OF THE CITY, THERE'S
NOTHING WORTH REMEMBERING.



WHEN THE STENCH OF
MALNUTRITION AND SUFFERING
PERMEATE EVERYTHING, YOU DON'T
WONDER WHY THIS IS HAPPENING...
YOU WONDER WHY YOU'RE
STILL ALIVE.





WHEN ORPHANS DIE OF
STARVATION, SICKNESS, OR
THROUGH VIOLENCE, THE PANGS
YOU FEEL AREN'T EMPATHY...
THEY'RE JEALOUSY.

...BECAUSE THEY
ARE FREE AND YOU
ARE FORCED TO LIVE
ANOTHER DAY.

AND THE DAY A STRANGE MAN
TAKES YOU BY THE HAND AND
OFFERS YOU FOOD, SHELTER AND
AN EDUCATION... YOU DON'T
JUMP AT THE CHANCE TO MAKE
SOMETHING OF YOURSELF...

YOU SECRETLY HOPE HE HAS
WICKED INTENTIONS AND YOU
JUMP AT THE CHANCE TO DIE.

THAT'S WHO I WAS WHEN
I JOINED THE ACADEMY.
WITHOUT HOPE OR FEAR.
I WAS NOTHING.

IT'S WHERE I NEEDED
TO START...TO BE BUILT UP...
TO PROPERLY LEARN THIS
TRADE.

IT'S WHY I LEARNED
THE VALUE OF HONOR
AND LOYALTY. IT'S
WHAT MADE ME AN
EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT.



RIGHT THIS
WAY, MISS IRIS...
WITH THE OTHER
APPLICANTS.


MISS ANG
WILL BE WITH
YOU SHORTLY.
CAN I GET YOU
ANYTHING?

NO,
THANK
YOU.

THEY
WALK OUT DUE TO
INTIMIDATION.

THAT'S
ONE WAY TO
NARROW DOWN
THE FIELD...
IRIS.







IT SEEMS YOU
TWO ARE THE LAST
ONES STANDING. THANK YOU
BOTH FOR APPLYING FOR THE
POSITION OF **EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT**.

I'M NOT
SURE WHAT YOU
KNOW ABOUT ME,
BUT I'M--

<YOU'RE MALY ANG...
OWNER OF ANG COMPOUNDS AND
ANG COSMETICS AND A MAJOR SHAREHOLDER
IN SHAO LABORATORIES. ALTHOUGH YOU ARE OF
CAMBODIAN ORIGIN, YOU'RE A PROTÉGÉ OF THE
LEGENDARY CHINESE BILLIONAIRE HAN LI SHAO...
AND YOUR WUHAN-BASED COMPANIES ARE THE
LARGEST PROVIDERS OF AGRICULTURAL
CHEMICALS, WORLDWIDE.>*



*TRANSLATED
FROM KHMER.



WELL DONE.
YOUR ABILITY TO
GOOGLE SEARCH IS
IMPRESSIVE. YOUR GRASP
ON BASIC MANNERS IN THE
WAY YOU INTERRUPTED
MS. ANG... MUCH LESS
IMPRESSIVE.



<AND
I ALSO SPEAK
CAMBODIAN.>



AS LONG
AS WE ARE LISTING
CREDENTIALS... FULL
DISCLOSURE:



SNAPDRAGON,
TOP OF YOUR CLASS OUT
OF THE NOW DEFUNCT XIANJIANG
ACADEMY. AN EXPERT MARKSMAN,
KNOWN FOR YOUR TENACITY AND
SPOTLESS RECORD... HAVING
NEVER FAILED AN
EMPLOYER.



EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT IRIS... ALREADY
A LEGEND AT 28 YEARS OF
AGE. RECOGNIZED THE WORLD
OVER FOR YOUR BEAUTY, YOUR
STEADINESS UNDER THE MOST
DIRE SITUATIONS AND FOR
YOUR UNPARALLELED
FIGHTING SKILLS...

DON'T
FORGET HER
PERFECT RECORD.
TWO EMPLOYERS...
TWO DEATHS.

IT APPEARS
THIS COMPETITION
IS STARTING TO
HEAT UP.

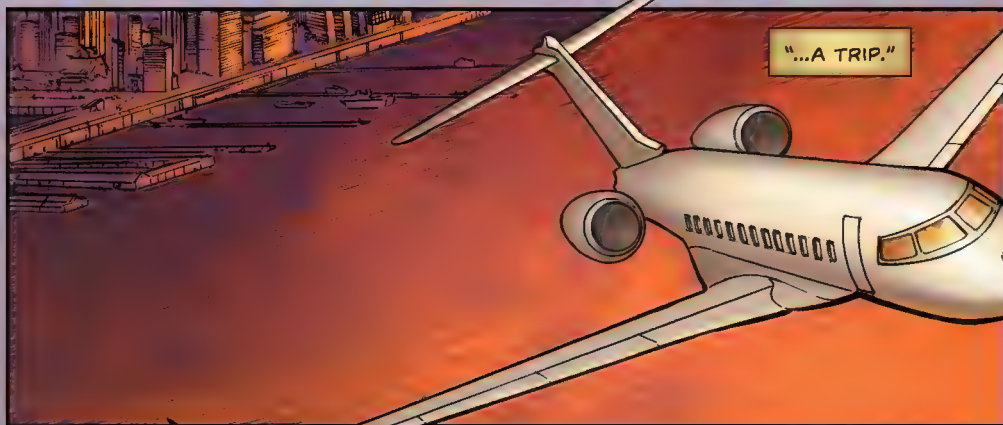


IF IT IS
TRULY BETWEEN
"SNAPDRAGON" AND
I... MIGHT I SUGGEST
A METHOD OF
ELIMINATION?

WORKS
FOR ME.



ACTUALLY,
I HAVE SOMETHING
ELSE IN MIND...



"...A TRIP."

SHINJUKU DISTRICT, TOKYO

PURPLE BLOSSOM
NIGHTCLUB, AFTER HOURS.

I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED
TAKING DRAGON DOWN A PEG,
BUT I AM INTRIGUED WITH
MALY'S HIRING METHOD'S.

I DO ADMIRE HER
DESIRE TO WITNESS OUR
WORK FIRST HAND...

...STILL, JETSETTING TO AN
IMPROMPTU MEETING HAS MADE
MY CUSTOMARY PREPARATION
IMPOSSIBLE.

THANK YOU
FOR TRAVELING OUT
HERE ON SUCH SHORT
NOTICE, MISS ANG.

AND JUDGING BY THIS
COLLECTION OF UNSAVORY
LOOKING MEN, I HAVE THE
FEELING THAT SHE WILL GET
TO WITNESS OUR FULL
REPERTOIRES.

WHILE MY
BROTHER AND I
APPRECIATE THE EYE
CANDY YOU'VE BROUGHT,
WE CAN'T HELP BUT
NOTICE THAT MISTER
SHAO IS NOT WITH
YOU.

I UNDERSTAND
YOUR CONCERN,
AKINORI... BUT REST
ASSURED THAT I AM
QUALIFIED TO SPEAK
ON BEHALF OF OUR
INTERESTS.

ARE YOU?
PERHAPS
MISTER SHAO
DOESN'T THINK
WE ARE MEN
TO BE TAKEN
SERIOUSLY.

THESE BROTHERS LOOK
FAMILIAR... BUT ARE TOO
YOUNG AND RECKLESS TO BE
OF CONSEQUENCE. HOLDING A
HIGH PROFILE MEETING AT A
NIGHTCLUB? IT'S AN INSULT.

I TOOK
THIS MEETING OUT OF
RESPECT TO YOUR LATE
FATHER. ALL YOU NEED TO
CONCERN YOURSELF WITH
IS WHETHER OR NOT I
TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY.

WORSE, THE OTHERS ARE CONCEALING WEAPONS...
WHICH MEANS THEY ARE EITHER DISREPUTABLE BUSINESS MEN...

...OR HIRED GUNMEN.

YOU
DARE INSULT
US?!

MAYBE
YOU NEED TO
BE TAUGHT A
LESSON!

ENOUGH!

I'M DONE
INDULGING YOU. SIT
DOWN AND ACT LIKE
CIVILIZED BUSINESSMEN
OR THIS MEETING
IS OVER.





<ARE YOU
READY??>

<AND THEN
SOME.>



NOW!

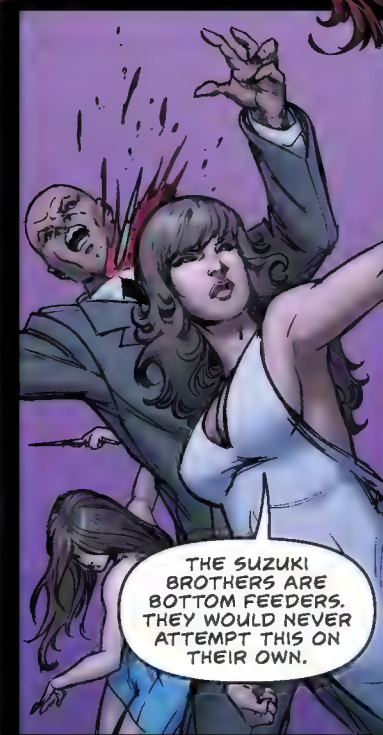
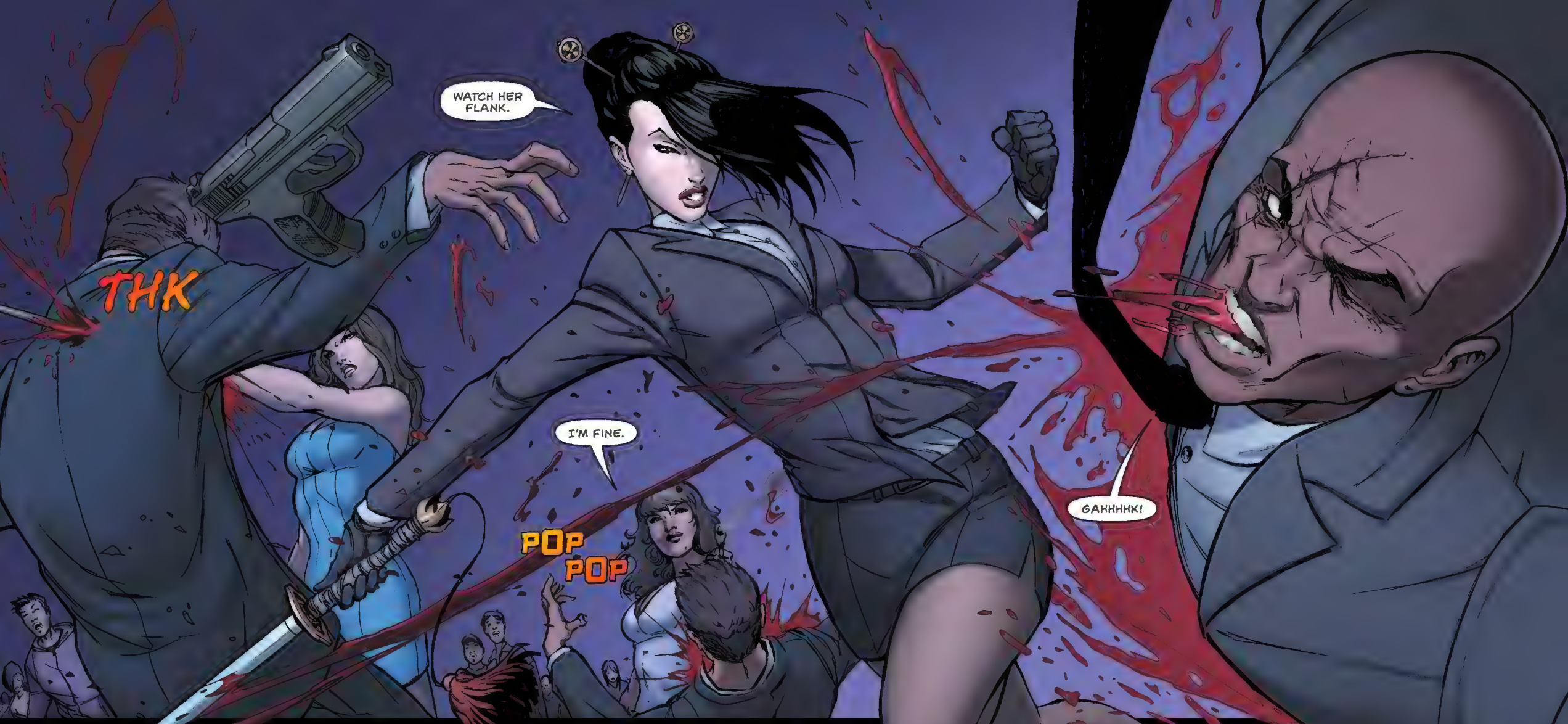
WAY
AHEAD OF
YOU!

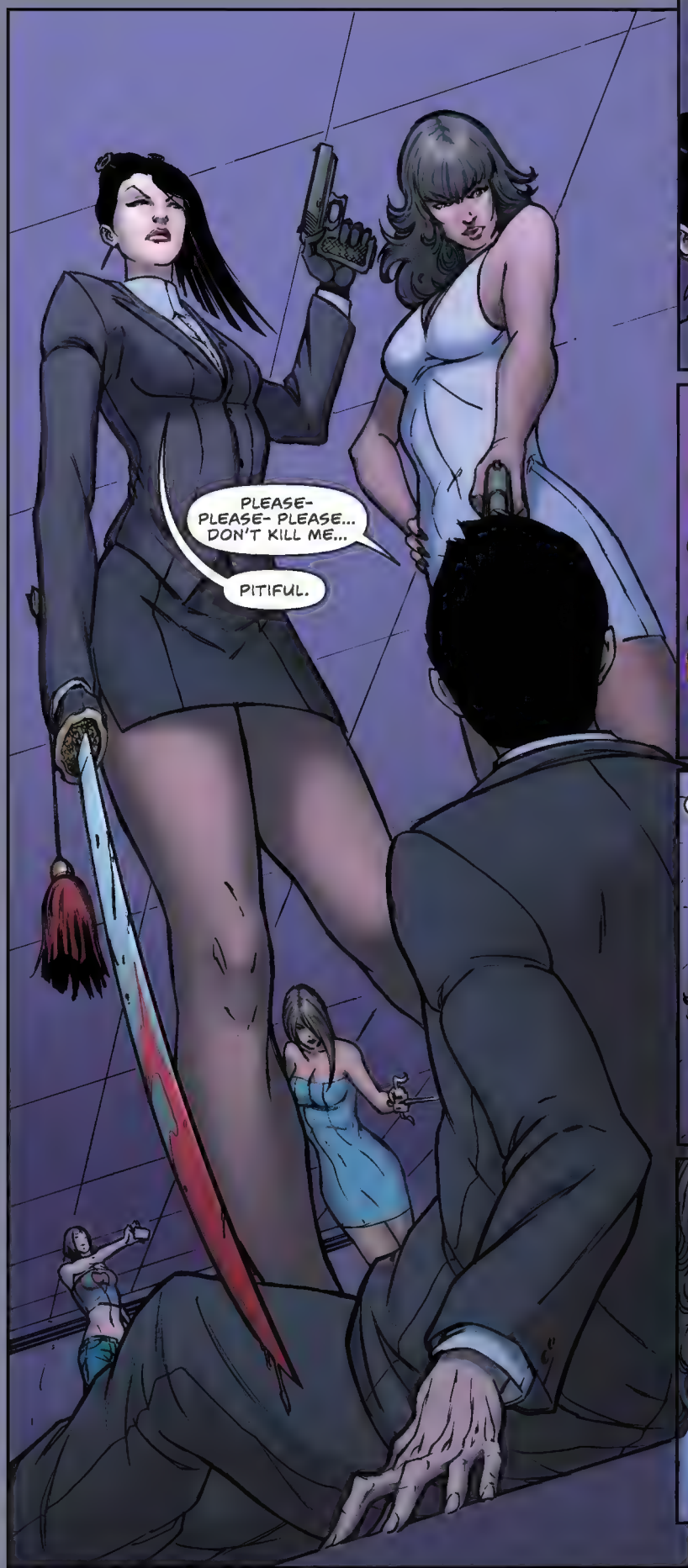


THIS ISN'T A
COMPETITION,
DRAGON.

CHA-CHICK

THIS
IS SOOOOOOOO
AMAZING. I'M TOTALLY
POSTING THIS ON
YOUTUBE.





PLEASE-
PLEASE- PLEASE...
DON'T KILL ME...

PITIFUL.



ARE YOU
ALRIGHT, MISS
ANG?



YES.

POP
POP
POP



MY GOD!



LEAVE
NO EVIDENCE
BEHIND.



YOU
DARE SHOW
ME UP?!

I WILL DO MUCH
MORE THAN THAT,
SNAPDRAGON!

KILLING
YOU WILL BE
ICING ON THE
CAKE!

KEEP TALKING,
ORPHAN...

wooooooohh

CLUMSY.

ENOUGH!

IS THIS
HOW YOU
DO BUSINESS?
WALTZING INTO
AMBUSHES...
AND KILLING
CIVILIANS?!

I'M NOT A
MINDLESS ASSASSIN...
I'M AN EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT.

CONGRATULATIONS,
DRAGON...

THE WUHAN ACADEMY.

I OWE MY LIFE TO THE
ACADEMY. NOT THIS ONE...
BUT ONE LIKE IT.

THEY TOOK ME FROM LESS THAN NOTHING AND BUILT ME
UP. THEY TAUGHT ME INNUMERABLE SKILLS AND INSTILLED
VALUES, HONOR AND RESPECT. THEY TRAINED ME HOW
TO LIVE AS AN EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT.

MY FIRST EMPLOYER, MISTER CHING, WAS A MAN OF MEANS WHO PAID
HANDSOMELY FOR THE HONOR OF MY SERVICES. HE NEVER TOOK THIS
LIGHTLY AND HE NEVER TOOK ME FOR GRANTED.

WITH MISTER CHING, I EXPERIENCED A QUALITY OF LIFE THAT FEW EVER
GLIMPSE. I WAS LAVISHED IN LUXURY AND I TRAVELED THE WORLD. IN MY
YEARS OF SERVICE, WE FORMED A BOND BUILT UPON THE ONE THING THAT
DOESN'T COME EASY TO AN ORPHAN FROM THE STREETS. TRUST.

AND THEN HE KILLED
THE MAN I LOVED AND
MY WORLD FELL APART.

SINCE THEN I'VE SOUGHT AN EMPLOYER
THAT I CAN DEVOTE MY LIFE TO. INSTEAD
I HAVE FOUND ONLY DISHONESTY AND
BETRAYAL. THIS IS NOT HOW THINGS ARE
SUPPOSED TO BE.

I LEARNED SO
MUCH ...EXCEPT
HOW TO LIVE ON
MY OWN.

I KNOW
YOU'RE HERE,
MALY...

...I HEARD YOUR
APPROACH.

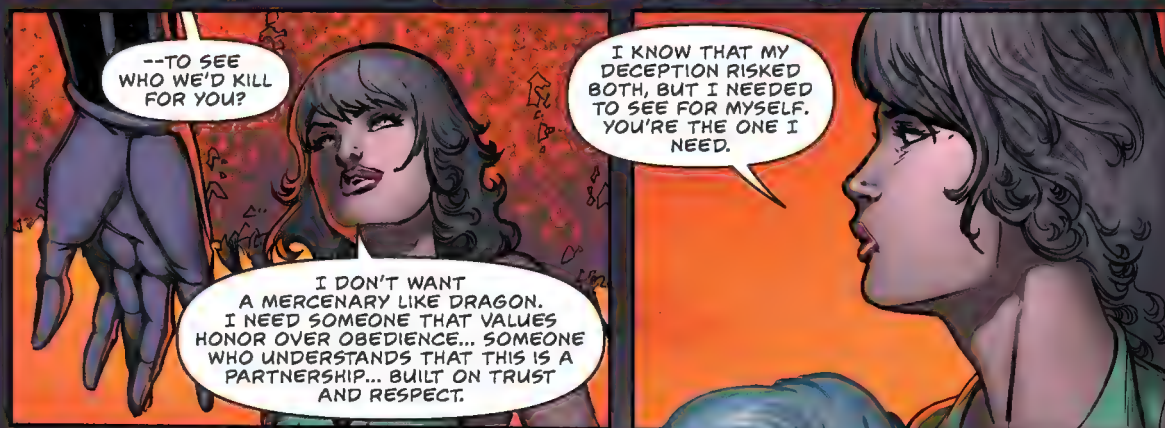


I OWE YOU
AN APOLOGY,
IRIS.

FOR NOT
WARNING ME THAT
YOU WERE LEADING US
INTO AN AMBUSH, OR FOR
ASKING ME TO KILL
AN INNOCENT?

BOTH. I KNEW
IT WAS A SET UP WHEN MISTER
SHAO CANCELLED AT THE LAST MINUTE.
BUT HONOR DICTATED THAT I
KEEP MY COMMITMENT.

I SHOULD'VE TOLD
YOU THE PARAMETERS
BEFOREHAND. BUT I
WANTED TO TEST YOU...
TO SEE HOW YOU'D
REACT--



--TO SEE
WHO WE'D KILL
FOR YOU?

I KNOW THAT MY
DECEPTION RISKED
BOTH, BUT I NEEDED
TO SEE FOR MYSELF.
YOU'RE THE ONE I
NEED.

I DON'T WANT
A MERCENARY LIKE DRAGON.
I NEED SOMEONE THAT VALUES
HONOR OVER OBEDIENCE... SOMEONE
WHO UNDERSTANDS THAT THIS IS A
PARTNERSHIP... BUILT ON TRUST
AND RESPECT.



EVEN IF I
COULD TRUST YOU,
WHY WOULD I WANT
TO INVOLVE MYSELF
WITH YOUR MESSY
AFFAIRS?



WE BOTH
KNOW IT WAS
YOUR MENTOR SHAO
WHO SET YOU UP.
THE QUESTION
IS WHY?

A man with a shaved head and a goatee, wearing a dark blue suit and tie, is leaning out of the open doorway of a large, dark grey ship. He has a stern, angry expression and is pointing his right index finger towards the ground below. The ship is angled downwards, and the background is a fiery orange and red sky with dark, swirling smoke or clouds. In the distance, two figures are visible falling through the air.

MALY
ANG!!! YOU
TRAITOR!

A close-up of a woman with long, dark hair tied in a high ponytail. She is looking upwards with a shocked and intense expression, her mouth slightly open. She is wearing a dark, high-collared jacket. A tassel from a hat is visible near her head.

HAN LI
SHAO?

A close-up of a woman with short, wavy brown hair. She is looking upwards with a surprised expression, her mouth open as if speaking or shouting. She is wearing a green sleeveless top.

TO BE
CONTINUED...
ALL NEW EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT: IRIS #2

CELEBRATING THE FIRST DECADE OF ASPEN COMICS!

ALL NEW
**EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT**
IRIS

#2

BLOCKADE
ENTERTAINMENT



**DON'T MISS
THE NEXT
THRILLING
ISSUE!**

WRITTEN BY:
BRIAN BUCCELLATO
(THE FLASH, BLACK BAT, FOSTER)

PENCILS BY:
PASQUALE QUALANO
(IDOLIZED, SOULFIRE: GRACE)

COLORS BY:
JOHN STARR
(LEGEND OF THE SHADOW CLAN, FATHOM, SOULFIRE)

**Featuring A Special Variant
Cover by Superstar Artist
FRANCIS MANAPUL**

NEW HONOR

By Brian Buccellato
Art by Pasquale Qualano

Technically, I'm a new addition to the Aspen creative family. That feels like such a strange thing to say, considering how long I've known these guys. Frank, Peter and I go all the way back to the mid-nineties. I've played mediocre softball and done some seriously inconsistent bowling with them... Vince, Mark, Frank and I have been gymrats and competed on lousy basketball teams together for almost a decade. Poker, parties, holidays, conventions... they've been a major part of my life for so long that it doesn't seem like this is our first dance. But it is, and I'm thrilled and grateful that we finally get to collaborate.

I'm probably even more thrilled that this collaboration is on Executive Assistant: Iris. Why? Because I'm taking the baton from series creator, David Wohl, who I happen to have known for over 25 years. Yeah, I've got history with these fools.

Nostalgia aside, when I was offered the chance to write volume 4, I jumped at the opportunity. Sure, my friendship with the fine folks at Aspen was an added bonus, but the real star of this show was Iris. Let's be real. Her job is awesome, she's a total badass, and she's gone through major adversity in the three previous volumes. In a relatively short time, David and Vince Hernandez (Executive Assistant: Assassins) have managed to put her through the ringer AND craft a fully fleshed out world. So for me, it wasn't about reinventing the world or re-imagining her; it was about using her past to propel her into the future.

That's where this series picks up. Iris has had multiple employers, and asskicked her way to the top of the food chain. She's a living legend and really has no peer. Her life should be on a super high note, but it's not. She's been betrayed too many times and it's taken its toll because lesser men and women have trampled the code of honor she adheres to. She's an executive assistant without an employer worth serving.

Iris is a ronin in search of a cause worth fighting for.

In "Honor Bound", Iris' search for an honorable employer will take her on an unexpected journey that will finally give her life meaning. But it will come in the form of something she least expected.

Needless to say, I'm really proud of this story. Thanks for reading... I hope you stick around for the rest of this ride. It's a doozy.

— B



Join
Brian Buccellato,
Pasquale Qualano
and John Starr
each month for
this exhilarating
thrill ride as they
bring you...

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ASSISTANT**
IRIS



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